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CAPTAIN JOHN MASON AND THE DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM

Miss D. Dymond, CBE, MA

In the year 1627 Captain John Mason made a purchase of the best house in Portsmouth, the Greyhound, now No. 11, High Street and known as Buckingham House. He was not a Hampshire man by birth but a free-lance, a bold adventurer who had wandered over half the world before he came to settle in Portsmouth: and it chanced that his varied career, always in search of another profitable job or lucky speculation, brought him in touch more than once with the great issues of history on both sides of the Atlantic. His highest ambitions lay, not in England, but in that new world which he had begun to explore across the sea: he was finally to establish one of the first settlements in New Hampshire, and his name is probably better known today in Strawberry Hill, or (as it was finally called) Portsmouth, in New Hampshire than in the English Portsmouth where he lived. In England he earned his living as a sea captain, a speculator in various financial projects and at one time a key figure in administration as paymaster of the army. During this time he was in close contact with that fantastic figure, the duke of Buckingham. Whereas the strong light of history beats upon Buckingham, Mason built his minor career in the shadows, and his story has to be pieced together from innumerable incidental references. Yet the two men were closely involved in the expeditions mounted at Portsmouth in 1626–8, and it was in Mason's house that Buckingham met his death.

Mason was born and bred in King's Lynn, the son of a well-to-do merchant of that town.[1] Though he was left fatherless in 1591 at the age of five, he inherited a substantial little nest-egg of £100 which must have become a considerable sum by the time he reached his majority, and as a young man of twenty-four he was in possession of 'a pretty little barque' with which he traded to Amsterdam and elsewhere. In 1610 he had the great good fortune to be appointed by James I, who was then holding his court at Thetford not far from King's Lynn, as the sea captain responsible for an expedition to the Hebrides under the general leadership of the Bishop of the Isles.[2] This expedition was successful and led to a number of other openings for Mason as a free-lance adventurer in the Scottish seas. At this time fortune seemed to smile on him. He had already married at the age of twenty, choosing as his partner Anne Green, daughter of a London goldsmith who was to leave her £100 when he died: and he had made a number of friends in Scotland whom he was to keep all his life, chief among them the famous John Scot (later Sir John Scot) of Scotstarvit, who shared his interest in exploration and mapmaking. But despite the happy adventurousness of his Scottish period, Mason laboured under a sense of grievance, for he had (as he alleged) advanced from his own funds all the cost of the Hebrides expedition under a verbal promise, never fulfilled, that he should be reimbursed.[3] The only payment made him was a grant of the 'assize herring', a tax on the herring fishery which brought him in a disappointing return. Perhaps he really had a grievance; but he took a very doubtful means of compensation. The unprincipled young man took to piracy as a sideline. He leased the island of Rona, which had a haven 'quiet for the fostering of thieves that await upon the spoiling of poor men's gear', and under cover of pursuing the king's business he and his accomplice Wilman lurked between the coasts of Scotland and Norway capturing trading ships. They did this once too often: Wilman was killed in a skirmish when he was recruiting crew in the Orkneys, and Mason's ship was blown by a gale on to the coast of Caithness, where the authorities at once arrested him. He was carried off to Edinburgh, confined in the Tolbooth and finally found guilty. On 12th August 1615 he was made to surrender his ship 'together with her anchors, cables, tows, munitions and apparelling pertaining thereunto, with the whole goods and gear which was within the said ship'. It was a terrible blow. Mason was stripped of his means of livelihood: and the circumstances of his loss made it impossible for him to continue his career in Scotland.[4]

But his friends stood by him. John Scot knew intimately the poet and courtier Sir William Alexander of Menstrie, later the earl of Stirling. Sir William was fired with the vision of founding a Nova Scotia in the new world, to balance the New England and New France that were coming into existence there, and Mason seemed just the person to explore the site. Through his English acquaintance Sir William knew of a London and Bristol company who were looking for a governor of their plantation in Newfoundland. Mason gained the appointment and with it began the great ambition of his life. It was not a purely selfish ambition. Like Sir William Alexander, Sir Ferdinand Gorges (a leader in colonial enterprise) and many others, Mason saw in American plantations, not only the hope of vast wealth and power for himself, but also the dream of creating new cities and states that would enrich mankind. 'Where was ever ambition baited with greater hopes than here, or wherever had virtue so large a field to reap the fruits of glory?' wrote Sir William. England was 'in travail for settling of Christian colonies,' said Gorges. History was to

Susan Villiers, Countess of Denbigh, sister of the Duke of Buckingham: from a painting attributed to Mytens, formerly at Newnham Paddocks; Earl of Denbigh's Collection.

show that while the personal ambitions of all these men led to nothing, the larger motive bred incalculable gains.

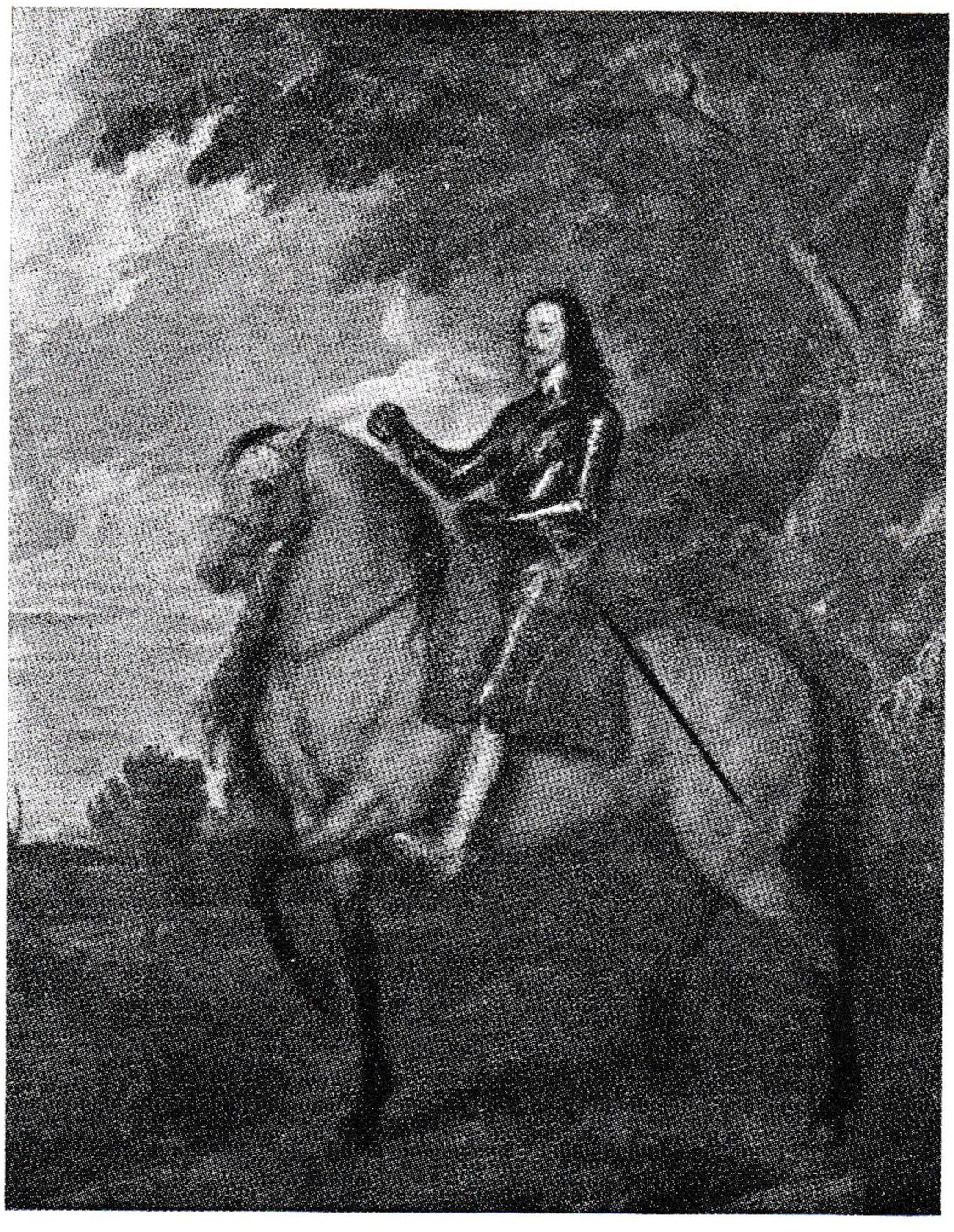
Mason spent six hardy, adventurous years in Newfoundland as governor of a small colony on Cupid's Cove. He emerged from them a different man – more responsible, more settled, more inclined to try for administrative or executive work than for adventure by sea. He gained a good reputation in Newfoundland as 'the worshipful Captain John Mason who did wisely and worthily govern'. He also undertook many expeditions westwards, exploring towards the lands that were later to bear the names of Nova Scotia, Maine and New Hampshire, and he produced a map of Newfoundland and a pamphlet entitled 'A Brief Discourse of the Newfoundland, with the Situation, Temperature and Commodities thereof, inciting our Nation to go forward in that hopeful plantation begun'. When his term of office with the Bristol company ended, he returned to England dedicated to the idea of colonisation. His connection with Buckingham and subsequent settlement in Portsmouth all arose out of his failure to realise this dream. He came back to England in 1621 looking for land grants and capital which would enable him to return to the North American mainland. He did succeed in gaining a grant from the Council for New England for all the land between the Naumkeag and Merrimac rivers together with an isle to be called Isle Mason, and a further grant held jointly with Gorges for land from the Merrimac to the Sagadahoc.[5] But disappointment awaited him. Except for the little group of enthusiasts, investors held back; in 1623 the Council's minutes ceased and it entered on a period of suspended animation. For the second time in his life, Mason's career seemed to have come to a standstill.

But in the seventeenth century the way to prosperity was to know the right people. Just as Mason's Scottish friends had helped him to Newfoundland, so his new court friends were to provide him with appointments in England. Gorges was now the commander of Plymouth Fort, and both he and Mason were well acquainted with the little group of Plymouth merchants who were supplying Buckingham's expedition to Cadiz. Further, and even more significant, Mason had a cousin Robert who was secretary to Buckingham himself and on friendly and jovial terms with him – in fact, in the will Buckingham made just before he came to Portsmouth for the last time, Robert was left a handsome legacy. Nothing could be easier than for the favourite secretary to drop a word in the great man's ear: and as a result Mason found himself appointed commissary general to the oversea force by the duke's express order.[6] So began his connection with a man who became the most powerful minister England has ever known, and perhaps the least well fitted to hold such an office.

George Villiers, son of an undistinguished Leicestershire knight, was one of the most conspicuous and disastrous figures in seventeenth century history. Trained from boyhood to attract a king's favour, he had every quality likely to please James I – he was engaging, gay, spirited and exceptionally handsome. His abundant natural vitality brightened the world for James, who 'was never so out of tune but the sight of my lord Buckingham doth settle and quiet all'. 'I desire only to live in the world for your sake,' this seventeenth century Saul told his David. First introduced to the court in 1614, Villiers was immediately loaded with lands and honours, and became successively gentleman of the bedchamber, knight, viscount, lord lieutenant of Buckinghamshire, earl of

Buckinghamshire, Lord High Admiral of the Fleet and finally duke. Since by nature he was both generous and highhanded, he soon acquired friends and enemies. To the latter he showed himself touchy and arrogant: to the former, excessively lavish. There grew up round him a circle of relatives, clients and campfollowers all hoping to enrich themselves. At the final scenes in Portsmouth, for instance, he was accompanied by the wife of his brother Christopher, whom he had caused to be created earl of Anglesea, and his sister's husband, now earl of Denbigh, while Mason himself might stand as an example of the lesser men building a career in Buckingham's shadow. The duke had not many true friends: Clarendon thought his greatest lack was a companion who would speak the truth to him on equal terms. But he possessed one devoted friend in the highest quarter. The young prince Charles had at first viewed Buckingham with an angry and jealous eye: but after Buckingham had prompted him to the incognito journey of 1623 to court the Infanta of Spain, the two returned on terms of closest friendship. Hence after James's death Buckingham was more powerful than ever: he was indeed, as Clarendon said of him, the most glorious star that ever shone in any court, and to the end he never lost his lustre.

Charles I on horseback: by Vandyke.
By courtesy of the National Gallery.



Clarendon also said of Buckingham that he was' an extraordinary person'. This was true. Buckingham carried both his talents and his defects to an extreme, and this was what made him dangerous. If he had been no more than a handsome, supple young courtier who feathered his nest well and was generous to his relations, history would have been little concerned with him. But he possessed remarkable initiative, both political and social. He showed a fearless readiness, not only to govern England but to lead her into some dangerous adventure. Nothing could have been more unwise, for Buckingham's defects as a statesman were glaring. His motives were almost entirely personal. He lacked all training, all knowledge of what was possible or sensible in the world of affairs: and while he understood so little how to succeed in political life, he had infinite opportunity to do harm. All royal patronage passed through his hands, all policy was decided by him, while he was responsible to no one but the master who wholeheartedly approved him. He was defended from the throne against the mounting criticism of the House of Commons. 'It is not fit to repose the safety of the kingdom on those that have not parts answerable to their places,' said a member. 'I would not have you criticise any of my servants, much less one that is so near to me', said Charles.

Buckingham's first attempt was an expedition against Cadiz in 1625. This was the year in which Mason entered his service as commissary general 'for the better ordering and dispose of the victual amongst his Majesty's fleet and army'. Buckingham himself did not accompany the fleet on this occasion, but Mason did, as captain of the *Helen*, a vessel of 200 tons carrying 37 sailors and 142 landsmen.[7] In the battle formation designed to be taken up if the enemy appeared, he was appointed leader of a small commando force 'to charge when and where there should be occasion'. Though the expedition as a whole was a fiasco, Mason's own record was meritorious. The shortage of food and drink that was one cause of the disaster had not been his fault, and Sir Edward Cecil, lord marshal and admiral of the fleet (later viscount Wimbledon), wrote of him that 'now I am

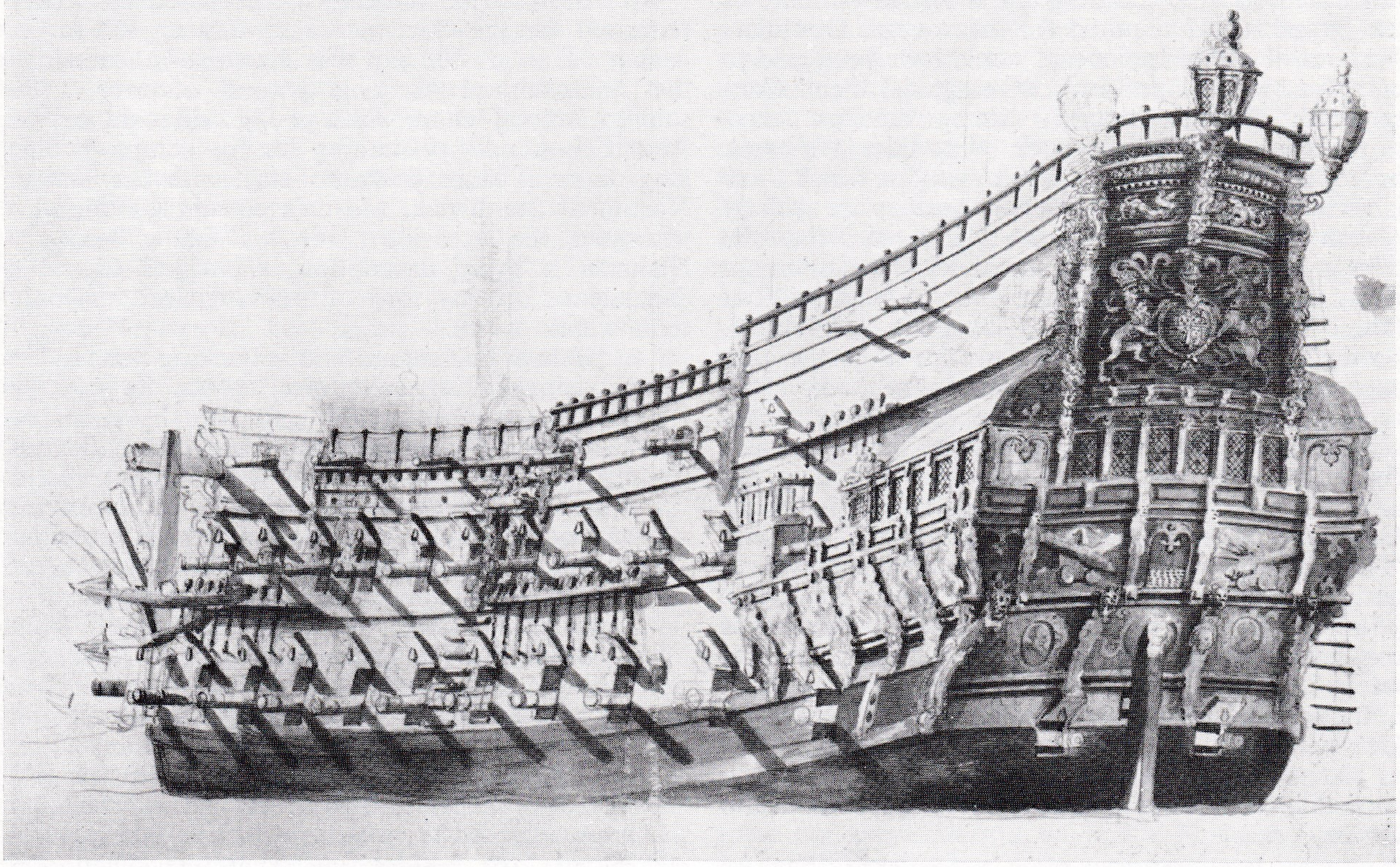
speaking of Captain Mason and his commissary, I must needs recommend him for an honest, sufficient, careful officer as any that could have been employed in the place'.[8] This report led to promotion for Mason in the new military projects which Buckingham launched as soon as the defeated forces began to straggle home from Cadiz. For the failure at Cadiz against Spain only made the duke more determined on a further adventure in search of the laurels of victory, this time against France. He designed a major land and sea operation to relieve the Huguenot stronghold of La Rochelle, which the French king was besieging. The rendezvous for the forces was Portsmouth.

When Buckingham became Lord High Admiral of England in 1618 (and none of his many honours delighted him more) the navy was in a state of miserable decay. 'The sea forces', wrote the Venetian ambassador, 'if we consider the royal ships, the chief bulwark of the island, formerly the strongest in Christendom, in the general langour and incredible neglect now resemble the tottering columns of some great ruin, being dismantled and derelict'. From this condition Buckingham was determined to rescue them: and it is his only claim to merit that he succeeded. To the decadent calm of the Venetian picture he opposed the vigour of a 'strong reformation'. The once derelict yards throbbed with activity. Surveys of the king's ships were regularly undertaken. A new dry dock was planned for Portsmouth. After the drift into war with France had begun, small squadrons were frequently despatched to sweep the narrow seas clear of the enemy. Plymouth was now superseded by Portsmouth as the centre of operations.

During the period between the Cadiz and La Rochelle campaigns, Mason became a familiar figure both at Portsmouth and Woolwich.[9] He was frequently employed to survey and repair the great ships, including the *Vanguard* and the *Dreadnought:* and in January 1627 he was even commissioned to inspect Woolwich dock, which he found iced up and almost dying of neglect – 'and there is no man to take care thereto, nor to husband the king's business'. Mason showed himself prompt and capable in such work. He was also much interested in ship design. Increase in sailing speed was the great object of the moment, for the English models, though solid, were slow, and in fact on one black occasion a Dutch vessel had derisively sailed right round an English ship. One of Mason's letters to Buckingham describes with enthusiasm the beauty of the *Spy*, a pinnace which he had just been overhauling at Portsmouth, and which had sailed seven ships of Dunkirk out of sight in three hours. 'And so well her sailing is improved with the cost I have bestowed on her, that she hath stolen the hearts of her captain and company'.[10] Sir John Coke, the Secretary of State, who was sent down to Portsmouth to expedite proceedings, complained bitterly that Mason commandeered his workmen to carry out these projects: the master carpenter had been to him only that morning to say that 'Captain Mason hath taken from him one of his chief workmen to go to sea in his small pilfering pinnace the *Spy*, and when he told him he durst not let him go without warrant, answered that your Grace's warrant to him was better than mine, and so took him by force. If your Grace suffer this, I tarry here in vain'.[11] Full of ideas, vigorous and a shade unscrupulous, Mason forged ahead, secure in Buckingham's favour. The opportunities offered by letters of marque in particular suited him admirably: they recalled the joys of his piratical youth, clothing piracy as they did with an air of respectability. As captain of the *Constant Reformation*, an appointment he received in 1626, Mason was often detached to 'ply up and down the Channel' and pick up French prizes. Captured vessels would be proceeded against in the Admiralty Court, and if they were condemned a tenth of the value was due to the Crown and a 'competent reward' to the captor. Records of cases in the Admiralty Court at this time not infrequently bear the marginal scribble 'brought in by Captain Mason'. Portsmouth harbour saw many a French merchant ship lying at anchor while her unfortunate crew haunted the town. Mason's friend Captain William Towerson, writing to press for some decision about the *Don de Dieu* laden with tobacco, fruit and wine, described their plight with sympathy – 'I wait daily for direction what is to be done with these Frenchmen, for I am so vexed by them that I cannot freely pass the street for their complaints: they are in great want of victuals, I sensibly discern it'.[12] The only consolation of the captives was that the French on their side were taking about the same number of our ships. Prizetaking was a good investment. People with a little money to venture equipped a ship with letters of marque and sent her off to make their fortune. Mason joined with another captain, Sir John Watts, in such an enterprise. As they were both called John and both based on Portsmouth, they christened her the *John of Portsmouth*, and very well she served them.[13] It was probably by such means that Mason became a man of substance. He was able to purchase the Greyhound and establish himself as one of the leading men in

The 'Constant Reformation'. This fine ship was built by Buckingham to inaugurate his naval 'reformation', after which she was named. She was later commanded by Captain John Mason. After the Civil War the Royalists sailed her to Holland, where Van der Velde made this drawing. She was lost at sea in 1651.

By courtesy of the National Maritime Museum, London.



Portsmouth. It was a proof of his solid reputation that in the spring of 1626 he was offered the important post of paymaster of the army in an expedition that was to expunge from men's minds the memory of Cadiz. Buckingham had determined to lead a navy and army to relieve La Rochelle, regardless of the facts that he had no money, that the Rochellois did not welcome his coming with enthusiasm, and that the French now possessed a navy of their own.

The land and sea forces were to meet for embarkation at Portsmouth, and Mason transferred his activity to mobilisation of the army. The forlorn remnants of the Cadiz troops were to be brought in by the sergeant-major Sir George Blundell, and fresh contingents were ordered to be raised in every county and marched to the meeting place. Mason was the key figure in administering the finance of this great operation, providing the soldiers' pay and clothing, and settling their billeting costs in the district round Portsmouth. His experience well illustrates the appalling weakness of the Stuart administration with its cumbrous machinery, questionable honesty and lack of sound economic basis. Enormous sums were assigned to Mason by the privy council – more than £60,000 between March and August 1627 – but payment came down to him only in driblets and arrears.[14] The money voted simply was not there. From the council's minutes it is clear that the government had no reserves to draw on but was living from hand to mouth, allotting money to Mason from French prizes or from the forced loan the king was demanding from his subjects as these sums came in: and often they did not come in, for the English people as a whole was infuriated by requests for free gifts or forced loans, and many reacted like the men of Berkshire who 'all with one voice cried out that their bodies and goods were ready to do his Majesty service, but that they would depart with no money except it were granted in a parliamentary way'. Vainly did Mason suggest a more efficient, stream-

lined method of accounting and a settled estimate of the 'grand stock' required for the voyage. Doubtless the council saw his point and would have been glad to comply: but the hard facts were against them. Consequently Mason's problems accumulated as delays in payment aroused mutiny on every side. 'We break here for lack of money or credit, without which there is no life in these actions'. 'Our necessities are such by reason of the low ebb of our last monies that the troops lodged at Southampton and Winchester are ready to break'. 'This payment must be made without fail, otherwise mutiny and disbanding will follow'. So the sad tale went on.[15] Two groups of people were expected to put down their own money and await repayment – the officers, who were assumed to be rich enough to carry their men's wages for a time, and the billet hosts, who were actually maintaining the army. Both groups were in despair. Goring (later Governor of Portsmouth), wrote of the soldiers, 'They are all absolutely broke, both officers and men, and for this last week have been as near a mutiny as possible for want of money'.[16] Mason bore witness that some of the billet hosts were as much as eight weeks in arrear and threatening to eject their guests. Southampton refused to accept the contingent from Dorset.[17] The Isle of Wight, originally rather pleased at the thought of getting pay for lodging soldiery, soon discovered that the soldiers were a nuisance and the pay illusory.[18]

Despite all these difficulties, a fleet and an army were beginning to take shape in the waters and hinterland of Portsmouth. But they were full of defects. 'I am now at Portsmouth', reported one captain, 'where I find great obstacles to the proceeding of this small fleet of ships. First they are not half manned, for (the mariners) run away as soon as they are sent . . . and all things are out of order'.[19] Blundell found the 200 pressed men from Hampshire such poor material that he sent 150 of them back again. He too was experiencing difficulty with discipline, and moreover he detested Portsmouth, 'a poor beggarly place where there is neither lodging, money nor meat for the soldiers, and no man will lend a penny'.[20] Several Portsmouth brewers were in trouble for brewing stinking beer, and they on their part were complaining about long arrears of payment. Worst of all, the plague was visiting Portsmouth, as was not unnatural in a small town suddenly swollen by numerous officials, billeted soldiers, sailors coming on shore and all the multifarious activities of victualling and servicing a fleet. So serious was the danger that the ships were moved westwards to Stokes Bay.[21]

By 11th June 1627 the stage was prepared and it only remained for the chief actors to step on the scene. A fleet of about 100 sail was assembled, headed by the *Triumph* and carrying a total of over 7,800 soldiers, among whom was a young lieutenant named John Felton now petitioning for his company. The king himself came down to stay with Sir Daniel Norton at Southwick. Mason's cousin Robert, who witnessed the occasion, sent his fellow secretary Nicholas a lively description, in which Charles's dependence on 'my lord of Buckingham' was only too evident

> 'Here at Portsmouth where the king came today to visit the navy, being met without the town by the mayor and at the gate by the governor Lieutenant Sir John Jephson and the soldiers of the garrison. His Majesty was brought round about the tower upon the bulwarks . . . where his Majesty saw what was amiss and hath promised (to the great content of the inhabitants) to repair the ruinous fortifications of his only garrison town in England. Upon his putting off from shore in his barge he was saluted after the military and usual manner of towns of garrison by the ordnance from every bulwark. From thence he went . . . on board the *Victory* . . . and afterwards to Stokes Bay, where he first boarded the *Rainbow* that lay in his way, and from thence he went on board the admiral betwixt ten and eleven, where he dined and stayed till two of the clock . . . At dinner his discourse was of the ships in general and in particular of the *Triumph*, enquiring of Sir John Watts (to use his own phrase) whether she could "yar" or no, saying withal as my lord of Buckingham told him she was an excellent sailer but that she was a little too hard in her helm – to which Captain Watts answered that they had mended that fault . . . and thus the king passed away a dinnertime with as much mirth as Sir Robert Deall, the fool Archie and my lord's musicians could make him. After dinner he went on shore where his coach attended him to carry him to Broom Down to view the troop of horses, being as pleased as might be expected in my lord's absence: which I could wish might not be long, for though Sir Daniel Norton's house be as pleasant a place as most in these parts, yet . . . it groweth tedious in my lord's absence . . . And thus with my cousin Mason's hearty remembrance I rest, your assured loving friend and servant, Robert Mason.'[22]

On this voyage Mason had no individual command: his work as paymaster took all his time, and he sailed on the *Triumph* with Buckingham and his staff. The usual fringe of indiscipline was found even among the officers: the duke himself raided the Portsmouth taverns immediately before sailing and found an officer sitting over his wine. However, the fleet at last got off on Sunday, 24th June 1627. Buckingham's presence with it was a sensational event, for the power and prestige of this young man, ten years ago a squire's son and now the first and most controversial figure in England, had become almost legendary. When in the course of sailing any ship neared the *Triumph*, its crew flocked on board to gaze and cheer.

Buckingham's plan was to seize the island of Ré almost opposite to La Rochelle, whence he could proceed to the mainland as and when opportunity served. Here there were two fortified places – the little Fort de la Pré and the strongly fortified citadel of St. Martin, both on the east coast facing the straits and the mainland. With the fleet riding at anchor, Buckingham effected a landing, not without difficulty, on the south-east. The fight was warm, and some of the invaders not particularly warlike. Several made efforts to retire to their boats, and one man, plunging after his retreating ensign, returned to a reproachful officer the cheery answer, 'What, shall I not follow my colours?' Nevertheless the landing party, urged on by the furious Buckingham, did succeed in establishing a bridgehead with the loss of Sir George Blundell and others. The French retired to their strongholds and made no further attempt to meet the enemy in the open field: they knew that time was on their side. The English swept through the island with deceptive ease until they reached St. Martin.

Now came the test of Buckingham. He, an untrained civilian, was in charge of a large naval and military force which had taken the initiative in a dangerous operation. Letters to Charles of course described him in brilliant colouring as a natural genius who 'from a novice became a victor' on the field: but the private journal of a subordinate officer shows him as arrogant and overbearing, looking only for personal glory and despising the advice of experienced men.[23] His plan was to invest the citadel by land and sea, digging before the landward fortifications a system of trenches which connected at each extremity with the line of ships drawn up in a halfmoon at sea. So the army settled down to the siege. One of Mason's pay accounts still survives, with a neat record of each rank's total wage from Sir Andrew Grey, master of the ordnance, at £3 a day, to the carpenter at 2d and the gunner at 1d.[24] His cousin Robert meanwhile was Buckingham's constant companion and the young men were cheerful together – 'I was very merry with you in my letter,' he wrote to a friend. 'My lord must needs see the letter and laugh'.[25]

But the cheerfulness was shortlived. Everything depended upon keeping a tight blockade, which on dark and rough nights was not too easy. And although St. Martin soon began to be short of food, the besiegers were short too. Within a month of landing Robert Mason was writing to tell Nicholas that speedy supplies of victual and munition were needed, while captains Mason and Watts were scouring the fleet to assess the remaining stores of powder. By September, Buckingham wrote that the men were beginning to think England had forgotten them. England had not forgotten: ships with abundant supplies were waiting at Portsmouth under the command of the earl of Holland: but contrary winds held them prisoner there. The war became one of attrition between besiegers and besieged.

On 28th September, a very dark and somewhat stormy night, the French by a gallant act succeeded in provisioning the citadel. Although their ships were sighted and the alarm given, the barques of the watch lost sense of direction in the darkness, and a force of thirty-five French ships suddenly appearing were able to break through the mass of the English fleet. Some were repulsed, others caught in the network of hawsers stretched between the ships, but fourteen or fifteen got through and were able to unload their supplies next day. The citadel was provisioned for another month: and the besieged tauntingly waved turkeys and capons on their pikes to tantalise their hungry foes. Nevertheless Buckingham, against the advice of his experienced officers, determined to hold on and wait for the supply fleet which was expected daily, although it had not in fact left Portsmouth. 'We have looked ourselves and our perspectives blind in looking after my lord of Holland from the tops of houses,' wrote an officer. 'If he come within four or five days, some good may yet be done. I have been ill of twenty-eight boats that relieved the citadel and a fever.'

When the news of the breakthrough reached Plymouth, the English could hardly believe it. Where was the splendid victory promised by Buckingham? Everyone began to fear worse tidings still, and an uneasy letter from Wimbledon to the duke shows foreboding that some signal disaster might take place as the initiative passed from the English to the

French and the probability of retreat grew stronger. All pretence that Buckingham understood the art of war by nature was now dropped, and Wimbledon begged him to realise that an army could not embark all at once and would need to be protected during the operation, 'for the enemy will venture anything to give you a blow at your embarking'. This was to prove a terribly true prophecy.

Buckingham failed in a final attack on the citadel on 27th October. When he received news that a French force 2,000 strong was marching from the fort de la Pré, he resolved at last to leave, embarking the army from the small island of Loix which was joined to Ré by a narrow bridge. Towards this island the dispirited English began to make their way. The French were now very strong, and they followed the retreating English, who at intervals stood and provoked an action. The French each time withheld their charge, knowing that a better moment for attack awaited them. Perceiving the English plan, they had blocked the entrance to the bridge by overturning a loaded cart. It was not until a part of the English army had scrambled across the bridge, another part was in transit and the rest waiting their turn that the enemy fell upon them. Complete confusion followed. 'Our men spoiled one another, and more were drowned than slain.' Buckingham, who, with his usual display of high personal courage had placed himself in the rear, rallied the men as best he could, and finally after heavy loss brought the poor remnant of his force on to the isle of Loix. Thence they embarked next day, leaving an image of the English soldier that was not dispelled till the days of Cromwell's Ironsides. It was for Mason later to estimate the size of the disaster.[26] He calculated that the number of common soldiers embarked at Portsmouth was 7,833. Of these 409 were lost at the landing, 100 in trench warfare and 120 by dysentery. In the assaults on the citadel and the retreat 3,895, practically half the total force, perished. A further 320 were missing. Only 2,989 men returned to land at Plymouth or Portsmouth.

It seems almost impossible that after such a *débâcle* plans for a fresh expedition should be raised at once. Nothing could be worse than the state of health and morale in which the troops had returned to England. Mason told Nicholas 'the great disaster among the fleet here had so dejected the hearts of men' that he did not think they would be able to perform a feat of arms with spirit for a long time. Yet such was the determination of Buckingham and the obstinacy of Charles, so completely were they insulated by the sheltered life of the court from hearing the clamours of the outside world, that there was no question of peace. The only consideration was how soon and how effectively another fleet could be got to sea. It can be imagined with what feelings the soldiers heard that 'in regard of the present necessity' they were to return to their former lodgings. It can be imagined equally with what feelings their hosts received them, and how bitterly the general public felt about the expedition as a whole. True, there was not the shock and incredulity with which the nation had heard the news of Cadiz. England was now more accustomed to bad news and no longer really expected a victory from Buckingham. But in the general mood of irony and anger, all the practical difficulties of billeting were exacerbated. Billeting in the port areas immediately before embarkation was of course inevitable if England were ever to send an expedition overseas and this was generally accepted: it was the continuous billeting throughout the year in order to keep the soldiers in the embarkation area, combined with the arrears of payment, that exasperated the countryside from Kent to Cornwall.

Mason set to work with his usual promptitude. He salvaged as much as possible of the equipment scattered by the soldiers on their debarkation, with such success that the Greyhound was stacked with muskets, pikes, swords and corselets.[27] He dealt with the stream of sick and wounded men leaving the ships, sending some of them under the care of surgeons to St. Thomas's and St. Bartholomew's hospitals in London, and boarding the larger number in Portsmouth at the rate of 6d a day. Billet dues and wages for the soldiers began to mount up again at once, and Mason's financial problems began again too. He was at first expected to meet the charges from the remainder of £20,000 allotted for Buckingham's expenses in the field, to which the Duke had added considerable amounts from his own purse. But Mason was obliged to inform the privy council that these sums were all gone, and the council accordingly ordered, in alarmingly vague words, that 'such sums as shall be necessary shall be issued to paymaster Captain Mason as fast as money may be raised'.

With this doubtful assurance behind him, Mason set off in December to see what was happening at Plymouth. Here he found an appalling situation. The troops, lacking officers, discipline or duties, were completely out of hand. Mason paid off the most mutinous and sent them home, while he doled out what money he could for officers' pay and soldiers' lodgings, pending a general muster. But there was not

nearly enough money to go round. It is obvious, for instance, from a surviving billet account of Abraham Colmer, a merchant of Plymouth, that many dues were still outstanding and that Mason had only been able to distribute small sums on account, just enough to prevent people from refusing to keep the men.[28] He was in an impossible position, assailed by threatening demands which were perfectly just and which he was the proper person to satisfy, yet without the wherewithal: and he had reason to suspect that even when funds were provided by the government, the corruption of the local official, Sir James Bagg, caused them mysteriously to vanish. His letters from Plymouth show a dejection and strain which are quite uncharacteristic of his cheerful nature, and which perhaps illustrate the general collapse of morale at the time.[29] He told Nicholas bitterly that if it were not for the hope of some support from Buckingham, 'I would retire myself into Tessel's barren desert rather than induce the incessant clamours and mutinous behaviour of the distressed soldiers.' And to Buckingham he wrote, 'I beseech your Grace to be mindful of procuring money for the troops, otherwise all will fall from order and myself must expect no better than a purgatory, if not a hellish incessant torment'. He completed the Plymouth job at a general muster on 20th December and then, having allayed the west country grievances for the time but with no money left for the Isle of Wight and Hampshire, he returned to Portsmouth, where it is no surprise to hear that he went sick for a few days.

Matters in Portsmouth were even worse than in Plymouth. The fleet had returned in great disrepair, and the continual delays that had prevented the building of a new dry dock were taking their revenge. Holland angrily declared that money for the dock had been 'ever promised, but nothing performed', so that ships must be sent elsewhere for overhaul – 'and if that be so', commented Sir John Watts, 'the sooner they go the better, for what with the sick men and those that will and do run away, the ships will not be manned to go about'. The men had indeed completely lost faith in the administration, and this was leading towards organised rebellion. In mid-December 1627 a number of ships' companies united in a conference and decided to leave their ships and march up to court to demand their wages.[30] Sir John Watts heard of the plan through an informer and tried to pacify the men for the moment with promises of money immediately to be sent down. Feeling little confidence in his success, however, he warned the mayor and the commander of the garrison to be prepared for trouble. 'They (the mariners) come to me in companies,' he told Nicholas, 'showing their want of apparel, demanding of me what they shall do, having been in his Majesty's service ten months without pay.'[31] Watts felt it necessary to ask for a deputation for martial law, but added pointedly that there would be no need for this if funds might be sent down – an illustration of the general feeling that the government was using martial law to cover the effects of their own mismanagement. Meanwhile the mayor, Henry Holt, was instructed to billet any sick sailors on shore, where they caused fresh disturbances. The first batch carried infection into the houses of their hosts, with the result that further consignments were refused admittance. Holt then placed some hundred and fifty men in two old houses of his own, where, 'to requite my kindness', they tore down the walls and lofts, burned fences and casks, and did damage, Holt averred, which £40 would not make good.[32] A series of violent storms which injured the wharves and storehouses heightened the misfortunes of the town.

In January 1628 Mason, recovered from his illness, made a determined attempt to get the financing of the army put on a proper basis and prevent corruption such as he had suspected at Plymouth.[33] He asked that all disbursements should pass through his hands and that a proper schedule of rates of pay should be drawn up by the council: payments should then be made to the soldiers when (and only when) they were standing in strict muster. Records should be kept of the sick and absent. Thus Charles might know with certainty, not only the monthly cost of his army, but also the number, fitness and state of equipment of its members. But events were to show that the widespread laxity and corruption defeated his efforts.

Such was the atmosphere in which the immediate causes of the civil war were being born. Englishmen in the provinces were not yet in general interested in constitutional principles, but they were surrounded with practical day-to-day grievances (embittered by the sense that these were all suffered for nothing, that they led to defeat instead of victory) that entered every home and made each man query what his rights were and what they ought to be. When, for instance, a private citizen in Buckinghamshire refused to billet a soldier and was consequently hectored by the man's officer, he appealed to a justice of the peace for protection. The officer retorted by a countercharge that refusal to billet was an offence punishable by law: but the magistrate replied, 'I had never read that word (billet) in any of our laws and knew not what

it meant, but if the meaning was that a man should receive the king's soldier into his house against his will and find him meat and drink without present payment, I do not know that any of our laws had ordained it to be an offence to refuse to yield thereto.'[34] It began to be argued that ancient laws like Magna Carta protected the subject from such exactions: while supporters of the government angrily replied that Magna Carta had been exacted from King John by a rebel army, and although kings since that date had graciously accepted it, 'it was never as now made a chain to bind the king from doing anything and a key to admit the rascal to everything.'[35]

Charles and Buckingham nevertheless continued to prepare for foreign adventure. Early in May 1628 a minor expedition under Buckingham's brother-in-law the earl of Denbigh was despatched to La Rochelle with supplies. Much to Charles's anger, the fleet returned having done nothing but 'look upon the poor town with eyes of pity', since they had found the sea entrance blocked by a 'triple palisado' of floating vessels. 'The king was never seen to be so much moved,' wrote a courtier, 'saying that if his ships had been lost, he had timber enough to build more'. Denbigh's return was only the signal for a more intensive effort still to provide a powerful striking force which Buckingham himself would lead later in the year.

Preparations centred on Portsmouth where Coke again came down to collaborate with Mason, Coke being specially concerned with the navy and Mason with the army. The arrangement pleased neither of them and their relations became somewhat strained. Coke thoroughly disliked war-time Portsmouth, 'that loathsome place', which Mason on the other hand liked well enough to choose as his permanent home. He was now fully ensconced in the High Street and as familiar with the chief Portsmouth residents as with sea captains like Watts and administrators like Coke. His chief associates were Captain William Towerson, vice-admiral and merchant, who owned a handsome dwelling with yards, gardens and storehouses adjoining, William Haberley the Puritan brewer who had a large house in Penny Street and Henry Holt the victualler, who was mayor at the time of Buckingham's expeditions. Portsmouth was in the habit of offering the freedom of the city to famous visitors, and both Buckingham and Denbigh had accepted this honour in September 1626.[36] Mason was admitted to the society of burgesses on 28th June 1628,[37] and by the following September he had received the unusual honour of temporary co-option to the small body of mayor's assistants or aldermen.[38] Meanwhile Coke lived in Portsmouth as an unwilling alien. His predicament is described in a journal of daily business which he kept during his Portsmouth stay,[39] as well as in a series of letters to Buckingham so long and woeful that they perhaps deserved the fate conjectured for them by their author – 'I fear the lord admiral never readeth them through'. Coke was commissioned to get Denbigh's fleet to sea again immediately. He fully realised the advantage of a quick return which would take the French by surprise. But he also realised the difficulty, since 'without money the endeavours and courage of all men grow cold'. His forebodings were confirmed. The navy was determined not to budge. Every ship that arrived declared herself in need of repair, and though the officers professed to push on the work, Coke saw grounds for scepticism: 'they mean not to haste away who have sent for their wives'. Rumours ran through the fleet that the king was sending his ships to an impossible task, and Coke was about to invoke the officers' help in ending 'this vulgar bruit of impossible success' when he learned that the rumours came from the officers themselves. The men were equally reluctant. They reported sick in increasing numbers, and those who landed never came back again. The crew of the *Garland* refused their beer, though Coke himself on sampling it found 'the beer had no fault but the unwillingness of the company to go again to sea.' The crew of the *Nonsuch*, ordered to weigh anchor, mutinied in Denbigh's own presence and threw overboard all their store of salt fish, and the *Rainbow*, the *Loyalty* and the *Esperance* on receiving a similar command ran themselves ashore on the Gosport side of the harbour where the mayor of Portsmouth had no authority.

Meanwhile the ships were being victualled by the Portsmouth merchants. Chief among these were Henry Holt, William Haberley and Owen Jenens. To judge by their letters, these victuallers were brought to the verge of ruin by their dealings with the government. They could not get paid by the king, hence they could not pay their own creditors. Holt averred that he dared not venture into Southampton or Newport for fear of assault – he owed so much money there. Writing to Nicholas, he offered to repair the king's brewhouse at his own expense if only he might receive the £4,000 arrears due to him, 'so that I might pay all my crying debts which maketh me write this same with watery eyes'.[40] The merchants sometimes safeguarded themselves by supplying goods in very small quantities so that the ships could not

leave till the money came down. From the evidence of their piteous complaints it would seem that they were almost ruined men. Yet the wills of both Holt and Haberley show that they had in fact amassed enormous fortunes for men of their scale.[41] Haberley left (among much else) to his son John 'half the manor of Bedenham in Alverstoke with its mansion-house, barns, stables, orchards and gardens' and to Anthony his 'brewing houses, millhouses and malting houses in Portsmouth.' Holt was able to endow his five sons handsomely with landed property in Alverstoke, Gosport, Elson, Fratton and Farlington as well as within the town and liberties of Portsmouth and on the newly developing area of Point. Frequent references to 'my new dwelling house', 'my new meadow', 'my house recently purchased' show that the victuallers must steadily have been investing their handsome profits in real estate. Nor were the mariners behindhand in enriching themselves. As the stores went into the ships on one side, they were stolen on the other, so that the king was paying for everything twice over. Coke said that he constantly saw sailors drinking in the taverns, and since they had received no wages, the money could only come from the sale of ships' stores. It was no wonder that Coke complained of his commission – 'I cannot in few words express the difficulties and confusion I am plunged in by this charge, and by having to deal with men that neither know law nor order.'

While Coke was struggling with supplies for the navy, Mason was in charge of the whole operation of conveying, billeting and embarking the army. His plan was to draw down the soldiers in a fan-shaped formation as near to Portsmouth as he conveniently could, and then to pass them into the ships as these arrived in harbour, at the same time bringing the more distant troops into the vacated billets to wait their turn.[42] The town of Portsmouth itself Mason designed to keep clear for such important personages as would come down at the last minute. Charges for billeting were 3s 6d a week, and for conduct money 8d a day a man, 16 miles for a day's march. Once again the flow of financial promises began to issue from the council, more than £40,000 between January and August 1628. Once again the money failed to arrive. And this time the former isolated complaints about the billeting system had swollen to a national volume. Every district had its unfortunate incident, its individual complaint. In April objections from Surrey and Dorset reached Parliament, and deputy lieutenants as far away as Northampton begged for some speedy order either to remove the soldiers or pay for them. The mayor of Canterbury declared that 'the markets are decayed, trading spoiled . . . the soldiers threaten to take meat from the butcher's shops'. The mayor of Southampton, pressed to accept two Irish companies of Lord Norton's regiment, pleaded 'the utter decay of their trade' and reminded the authorities that they were already thirteen weeks in arrear: the immunity of Portsmouth from billeting the common soldier in particular infuriated Southampton. And the disorderly conduct of the soldiers added to the general indignation. They stole, they poached, they quarrelled, they even murdered. Especial trouble was caused by the Irish detachment, 'whose rudeness', declared Southampton, 'is a double affliction'. A murder committed at Botley by one of Captain Hunch's men led to a parade of his whole company before the inhabitants, when one Alexander Stewart was identified and later found guilty. Another man named William Morgan was found guilty of a murder at Gosport. At the beginning of August Coke wrote urgently begging the lord keeper to issue a new commission of Oyer and Terminer to deal with the disorders – 'I beseech your Lordship, haste it away!' But justice for the disorders was not always to be had. A Mr. Higgins of Chichester complained that, having been assaulted by a lieutenant and two or three men in his own house, he came down to court to indict the offenders, only to find the captain and other officers on the bench and the hall full of soldiers.[43] To a community enraged by such acts, Mason had continually to explain that money was on its way but had not arrived yet. Nor was it easy to discover the amounts due, for neither the officers nor the billet hosts were particularly honest. It was known that they connived together 'to show many passe-venants in your companies, by which the companies will appear stronger to your Grace than indeed they will be able to march, and the householders will receive more for their billet money than they ought'.[44] Refusal to accept billetees was spreading, especially in the Portsmouth area. The bailiffs of Basingstoke, for instance, declared on 14th May that having long born the burden of conducting and billeting soldiers without as yet receiving one penny of the money disbursed, the country people 'now utterly deny to billet any soldiers, alleging that they well know we have no law or authority to compel them thereto'. All this turmoil and social unrest was taking place against the background of parliamentary action, as the third parliament of Charles I ran the turbulent course of its first session. It was on 7th June that, after a struggle of

unprecedented violence between crown and commons, the king gave his assent to the Petition of Right, with its request that soldiers and mariners should be removed from the houses of unwilling hosts and that 'your people should not be so burdened in time to come'. But this concession had no short term effects at all, and in fact Mason received his main assignment of money for the maintenance of the army less than a month after the bonfires had blazed to celebrate the king's surrender.

Meanwhile in Portsmouth the final preparations were being made. These included some tricky operations, in particular the making of 'fireworks' to break through the palisado at La Rochelle. In a crowded town containing many wooden buildings the fire risk was considerable, but the mayor of La Rochelle had sent an urgent recommendation that the relief force should come provided with such weapons. Buckingham was advised to send for 'that old arch-pirate Captain Cary, whose quarter is at Gravesend – he always desires to deal with fireworks'. Holt borrowed three barrels of gunpowder from the king's store for him, and set aside for his use a house on the dockside, against which the fire-ships could ride 'to take in the fireworks as they shall be made'. The victualling of ships was almost completed, though with many complaints about the quality of the beer, bread, fish and meat. Coke's journal is full of inspections and attempted precautions against fraud. He was doubtful, for instance, about the fish supplied by Henry Holt, who agreed that the goods should be judged by 'indifferent men': but as these turned out to be Owen Jenens and William Towerson, Holt's close associates, their impartiality is questionable. Mason meanwhile had prepared 4,000 suits of clothes ready for distribution. During the course of August the ships from London were coming in, and finally the whole fleet was gathered – nine king's ships, nine whelps, twenty-nine Newcastle ships (among which was the *John of Portsmouth*, carrying forty seamen and fifty landsmen), seven victuallers and four fire-ships. The *Swiftsure* was splendidly prepared for the duke: his cabin contained a bed with damask curtains and counterpane, together with a great chair and six stools also of damask, and the stores included wax candles, sweetmeats and bottles of rose water for his use.

The little town was now crammed with visitors far exceeding in number its own inhabitants, and the resulting state of overcrowding, disturbance and insanitation can be imagined. The sea captains and army officers not yet on board were accommodated in the substantial houses of the town, and Mason reserved for himself the supreme honour of accommodating the duke. 'Your Grace's lodging is prepared in my house here,' he wrote, 'which will not only grace it and myself, but shall bind me perpetually to remain your Excellency's most humble devoted servant'. Although none of the common soldiers were lodged in Portsmouth, there was still a considerable number of miscellaneous persons for whom places had to be found – surgeons, for example, and gentleman soldiers. One result was that prices soared so high that innumerable complaints reached the council of 'the excessive rates of all things in this town', and a letter was sent to Holt and his fellows blaming them for negligence of their duties and ordering them to see that a moderate rate was put upon all kinds of victual, lodgings and horse fodder.[45]

In the electric atmosphere rumours ran fast. Fears of impending invasion, Portsmouth's historic problem, were bound to arise. There had been a great scare in April of an approaching armada, which turned out to be no more than a covey of Dutch trading vessels. In August reports came in that 'they begin to make barges in Brittany for a landing of cavalry in the Isle of Wight and at Portsmouth, of which a Scotchmen has given the cardinal a plan'. Spy stories also multiplied. On 3rd August Coke reported that a Frenchman had appeared in Southampton ostensibly bearing letters for the duke, but rendered suspect by his extreme reluctance to meet M. de Soubise, the Huguenot representative who was to accompany the expedition. Later this man arrived in Portsmouth, where Coke discovered 'that he is a true juggler, and pretending to be a chevalier de Malta is indeed a monk and well known to M. Soubise'. Soubise affirmed that 'this is the most dangerous man in France and the only secret of the cardinal, employed in all the practices of that state'.[46]

Naval indiscipline increased. The mariners were said to be 'running away in troops', and those who remained were 'so heady' that no one could control them. 'The gunner of the *Vanguard* abuseth the master and was by the admiral put in bilboes, yet continueth to abuse him'. Coke thought the remedy was obvious: the men needed the more frequent presence of their officers and a system of command 'such as may put more life into them'. For instance, when the crew of the *Entrance* was ordered aboard and absolutely refused to go, 'with wild words against the admiral', it was found that their master was absent and their captain had reported sick. Coke commented that the admiral would be well advised

'to keep better attendance on board, and then he might hope to keep government among them'.

Such was the state of Portsmouth that it was unfit to receive the king. 'This town is already so pestered with mariners sick and whole that I fear it will be no place for his Majesty's access,' wrote Coke to Buckingham. Hence it was arranged that Charles should take up his old quarters at Southwick,[47] which became the site of the court and the privy council. But dangerous though Portsmouth was for him, Buckingham was determined to take his place nearest the scene of embarkation. To friends who urged him at least to wear a protective coat of mail, he answered casually, 'It needs not: there are no Roman spirits left'. After greeting the king at Southwick and being received by the whole company in the base court 'as if he had been the greatest prince in the world', Buckingham rode down the hill and crossed Portsea Island to enter Mason's house in the High Street. This must have seemed to Mason the zenith of his career: the greatest man in England was actually a guest under his roof, and though he was in reality only a superior kind of billet host, still no other commoner had that distinction. Yet he was well aware that the situation was perilous, for he was entertaining not only the greatest but the most threatened of the king's subjects.[48]

Trouble soon began. On 16th August, as Buckingham was leaving the house to attend the king at Southwick, a tumultuous crowd of some three hundred sailors flocked round his coach demanding pay, and one man actually made as if to pull the duke from his seat: whereupon Buckingham leapt out, seized him and bundled him into the house. He then faced the mob, speaking to them fair and doing his best to appease them with the charm and readiness he could always display. Apparently he believed he had succeeded, for he then proceeded to take coach and depart. But the sailors had been silenced only for the moment: no sooner had Buckingham gone than they surged up again, shouting that if the prisoner were not freed they would tear the house down. Mason, a far more experienced man of action than Buckingham, felt that it was essential to take the heat out of the situation, and not allow one incident to set fire to the explosive atmosphere of the town. He released the prisoner: and, as he had foreseen, the man's mates were instantly pacified and the street gradually cleared. Mason brought on himself the king's displeasure by his action, but he had the satisfaction of knowing that he had restored an uneasy peace. Unfortunately, however, on his return from Southwick Buckingham met and recognised his assailant walking down the street and angrily had him re-arrested. Instantly violence flared up again. As the man was led off, the sailors in a riotous mob attacked his guard with stones and cudgels. The officers turned out in force to repress them, and Buckingham himself, sweeping up on horseback with his staff, drove the men at sword's point down to the waterside and so to their ships. Many were left on Point dead or wounded. An eyewitness estimated that two hundred swords had been drawn.

Little could be hoped for the morale of an expedition so inaugurated. But in fact Buckingham was never to lead out his forces, for at the very time when trouble was boiling up in Portsmouth, the man determined on his assassination was travelling from London. This was John Felton, the lieutenant who had taken part in the Ré campaign and been disappointed of his promotion. He was prompted in part by his personal grievances, but partly also by broader motives. Happening in the shop of a Holborn scrivener to come across a copy of the House of Commons Remonstrance of 25th June 1628 which expressed some of the general feeling against Buckingham, 'it came into his mind that by killing the duke he should do his country great service'. He quitted London, leaving word at a church to pray for a man 'grievously discontented in mind', reached the Portsmouth district by walking or riding as he could and spent the night of 22nd August at a small village about three miles distant from the town – perhaps Kingston. He carried a knife bought on Tower Hill for tenpence, whose sheath he had sewn to the lining of his pocket. On the morning of 23rd August he arrived at the Greyhound.

Mason's house has been so often altered internally since 1628 that it is hard to place the exact site of Buckingham's death. But apparently in his time there was a parlour connected by a dark passage with a large galleried hall. The gallery led to bedrooms which on that August day housed among others the duchess (who was pregnant) and Buckingham's sister-in-law, the Countess of Anglesea. Buckingham rose early, leaving the duchess in bed, was attended by his barber and went to breakfast in the parlour, accompanied by Soubise. Felton was actually leaning against the window while the duke was under the barber's hands, and during breakfast he joined the group of men in the hall who had business with Buckingham or were waiting to attend him. This would be a fairly numerous and miscellaneous company in which Felton's presence would seem quite

George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham on his deathbed: by Vandyck.
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natural – 'unknown among many and yet well known amongst many, as having been a lieutenant in the army'. A rumour, which only Soubise was knowledgeable enough to discredit, that La Rochelle had been relieved was spreading a cheerful atmosphere, and within the parlour Buckingham was in the highest spirits, executing a fantastic dance round the room and exclaiming that they must carry this good news to the king. As he was leaving after breakfast to take coach for Southwick, the incredible scene took place in which a man was stabbed to death, surrounded by his friends and attendants in a crowded room, without anyone seeing who struck him, or even realising at first that he had been stabbed. Buckingham entered the hall, where Sir Thomas Fryer came forward to speak to him. They exchanged the sweeping bows of the seventeenth century, the leg advanced and the whole line of the body bent. Sir Thomas's bow was of course the deeper and slower, and it was as he still bent forward, while Buckingham was rising, that Felton delivered the blow over Sir Thomas's shoulder. The duke uttered a short, half-heard cry – 'Zounds! the villain has killed me!' – partly drew his sword, and fell. As they crowded to attend him, thinking him in a faint till they saw the blood, Felton walked quietly away: and if he had walked out of the house, he might have escaped. But in the horror of the moment he went inwards, reaching the pantry where he stood among the servants until, hearing cries of 'A Frenchman! A Frenchman!' – for suspicion had at first fallen on Soubise – he thought he recognised his own name and stepped forward to acknowledge his act. All was confusion. Felton was violently attacked by many, but saved by Carleton and others for a worse fate: and while some ran to close the town gates, others still (as they thought) pursued the murderer, and women on the gallery held the fainting duchess, there lay in the hall, unattended and ignored, that which had been George Villiers.

The news of Buckingham's death was received by the king in stunned and rigid silence, followed by an outburst of grief and determination to pay homage to the duke's memory in every possible way. Within a week the solemn cortège left Portsmouth, the coffin carried to its coach by colonels and other officers of the field while the sea captains on their ships sounded the final salvo of respect. A huge baroque monument later erected by the duchess, where distraught nymphs mourned their hero, almost filled one of the side chapels of the great Lady Chapel of Henry VII in Westminster Abbey. Buckingham's sister Lady Denbigh placed in St. Thomas's church,

Portsmouth, a monument dedicated to the memory of one who 'possessed in an eminent degree the gifts of nature and fortune'. The symbolism of this cenotaph expresses the myth of Buckingham as his admirers saw him. At its base Fame blew her golden trumpet, and above the urn which by a (groundless) local tradition enclosed Buckingham's heart soared a triumphant phoenix.

But while the few who truly loved Buckingham mourned, England as a whole rejoiced. 'They say the king took his death very heavily,' wrote Sir Francis Nethersole, 'keeping his chamber all that day as is well to be believed. But the base multitudes in this town (London) drink healths to Felton, and there are infinitely more cheerful than sad faces of better people'. For Portsmouth, of course, the main interest was whether the fleet would sail or not in the altered circumstances. Soon news came that the earl of Lindsey was to lead out the expedition. The exasperatingly slow, cumbrous business of getting the forces to sea began again, robbed of any lively optimism it might ever have possessed. By the beginning of September Coke, who was still in Portsmouth, wrote to tell a friend that he had just seen the lord general ride in person up and down the streets calling mariners to their ships while everywhere men were shouting 'Aboard! Aboard!' The king himself came down to speed the troops: they cheered him dutifully, but also called out an entreaty that he would be good to Felton, 'their once fellow soldier'. No one really believed in the enterprise: even Charles declared that if the entrance barrier did not yield to Lindsey's assault 'the king will hold himself excused to the world'. In actual fact the expeditionary force arrived too late to be of use. Lindsey had sent in the fireships and was waiting for a fair wind to begin the attack when news came that La Rochelle had at last surrendered. Sir Thomas Fryer and others went ashore to visit the town they had so often viewed across the water. On 24th October the king of France made his ceremonial entry: and on 25th October the English admiral gave the order to set sail. The days of the great foreign adventures were over.

Mason, however, continued to deal with the aftermath of army finance and lived as a Portsmouth citizen for the rest of his life. His name generally heads the list of burgesses in the sessions book. The fences of his substantial estate are mentioned as boundaries in local documents. At one time he was presented in the Leet Court for encroaching on the High Street by the handsome stone wall he had built on his frontage.[49] He identified himself wholeheartedly with Portsmouth interests. He and his friend Towerson acted as champions of the town in a struggle for supremacy between the civic authorities, who had arrested a ship's cook for disorderly conduct, and the naval authorities who defended him.[50] 'We are mightily heaved at by the town,' wrote the Clerk of the Cheque, 'whose instrument aloft is Captain Mason, and the incendiary here is Mr. Towerson'. Mason did not win this battle, for the ship's cook was released and the town clerk imprisoned in the Marshalsea for detaining him. But he was more successful in supporting the claims of Portsmouth as a naval base. At this time there was considerable competition between harbours and dockyards. Mr. Burrell of Chatham was believed to have filled in the old dry dock of Portsmouth and designed to pull down the main storehouse 'to the end that he might have all the business to himself at Chatham'. Others defended Plymouth, the traditional port of departure for distant voyages. But Mason agreed with his friend Sir Henry Mainwaring that 'the difference between Portsmouth and Chatham is as much as for one to have his sword drawn in his hand, whilst the other is rusty in his scabbard', and in regard to Plymouth he told Buckingham that 'the commodiousness of this port (Portsmouth) is easily discerned and approved before that of Plymouth, whose ground is rocks and dangerous for ships'.[51] Mason also undertook the rehabilitation of Southsea Castle, whose captain he became in 1634. This stout and neat little fort, built by Henry VIII as one of his coastal defences, had fallen into great disrepair during the long peace and also suffered from a fire in 1626: yet it was, Mason said, not only 'the most exquisite piece of fortification in this kingdom' but also 'the outwork of the town and chief guard of the harbour'.[52] During 1635 Mason was 'busy about repairing the walls of the moat and drawbridge and gates' as well as planning extensive alterations and an increased strength of gunners and ordnance. He also surveyed the forts of Gravesend and Tilbury with such efficiency that he was made commissioner to travel twice yearly 'from one end of the kingdom to another and cross the seas to Jersey and Guernsey' to report on the state of defence. Long after his death people are found enquiring whether any plans are available drawn by Captain John Mason.

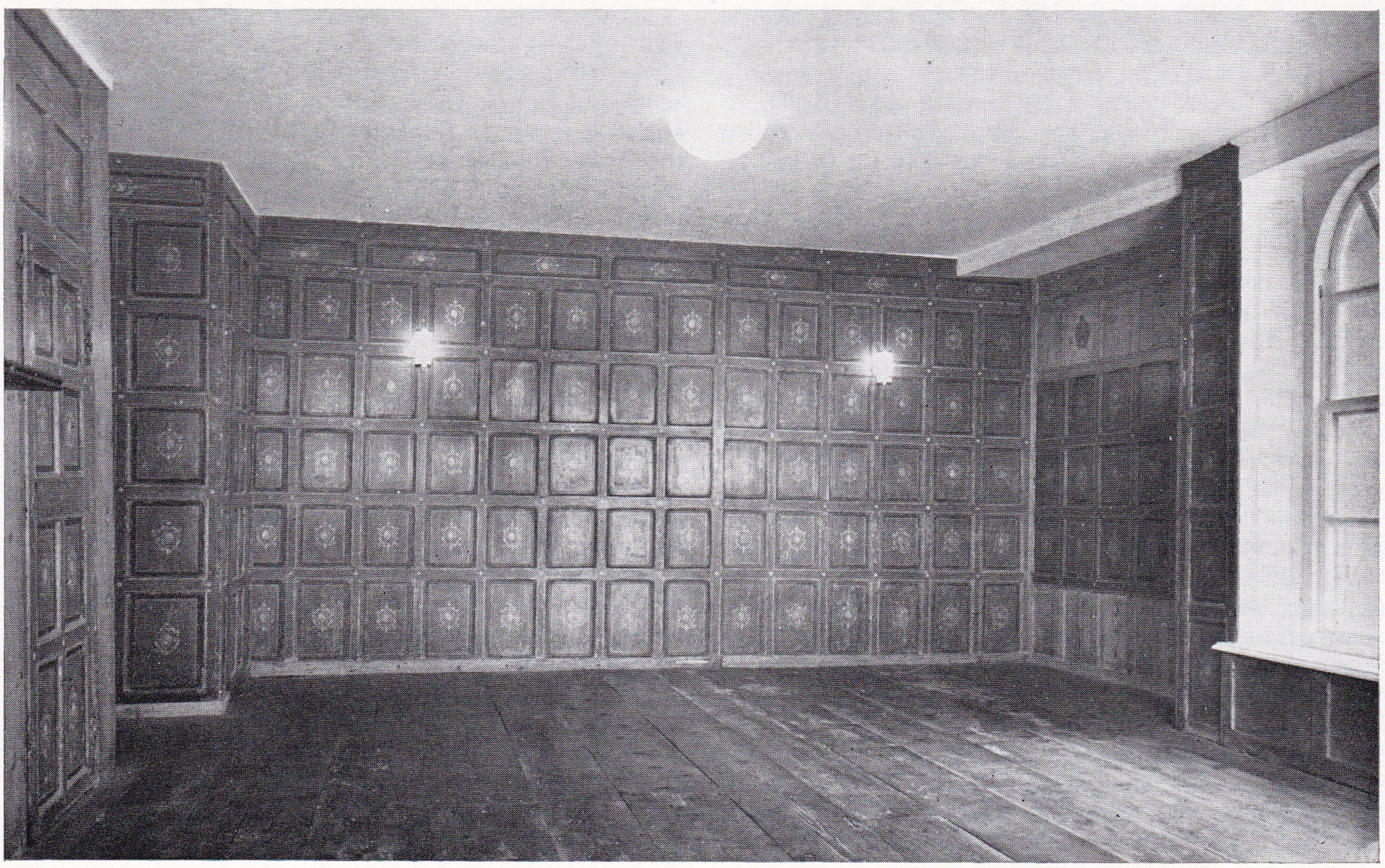
This last appointment shows that Mason, although he based his life on Portsmouth, did not give up his wider interests. This was indeed far from the case. His busy brain was always hatching schemes for getting rich, and nothing was too farfetched – he had

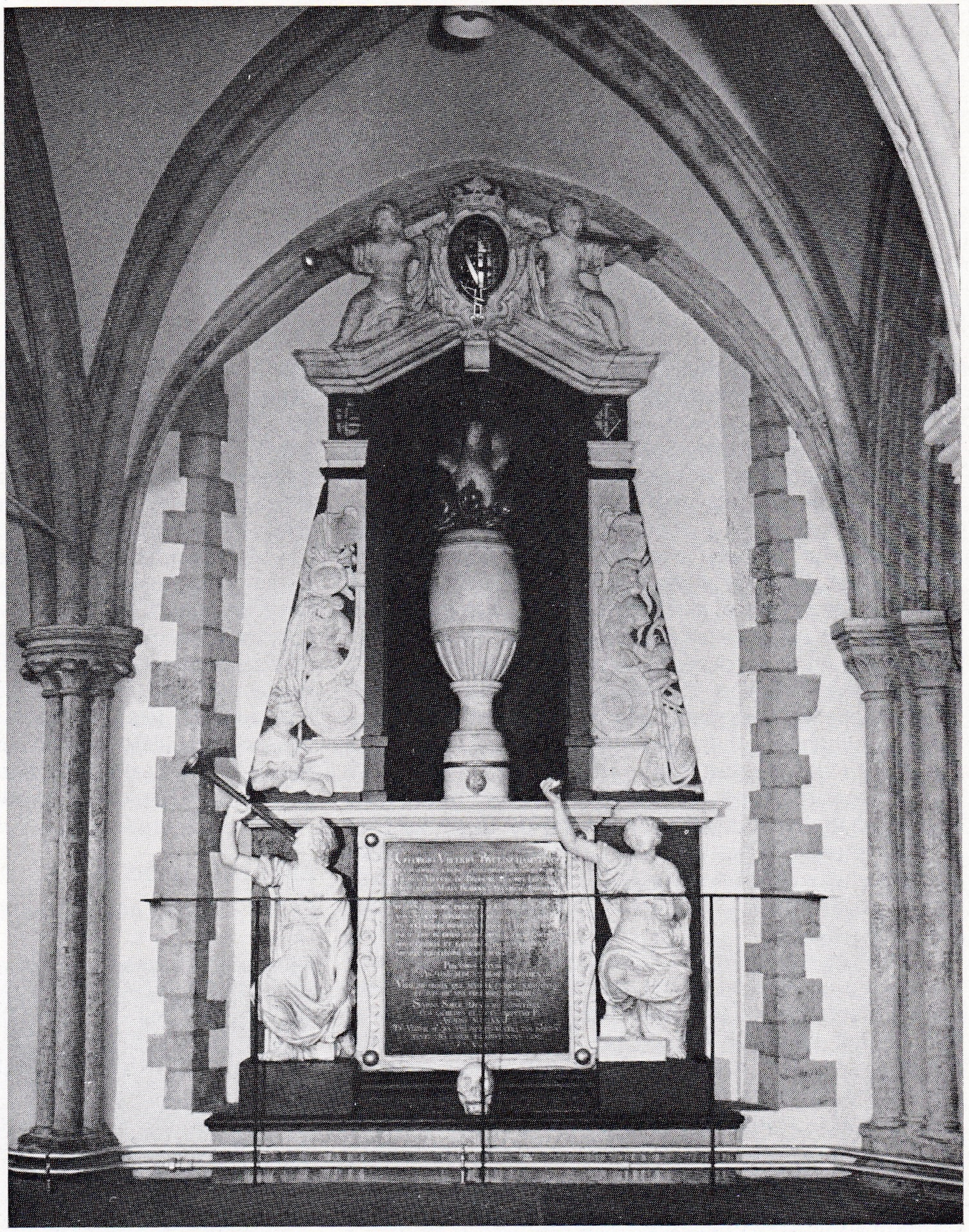
Exterior of the 'Greyhound' in its present form as Buckingham House, 11 High Street, Portsmouth.

Photograph by
J. A. Hewes, Portsmouth.

Panelled room in the 'Greyhound'.

Photograph by J. A. Hewes, Portsmouth.





Buckingham's Monument in Portsmouth Cathedral.
Photograph by the Portsmouth City Engineer's Dept.

at one time a scheme for settling a salt-producing English colony on the island of Mayo off the coast of Africa.[53] He bought a second house in Fenchurch Street, London, which he used for board meetings of his various companies, and a third at Deptford. He set up a coach with two horses. He possessed a valuable link with the city of London in the person of John Woolaston (later Sir John) whose wife Rebecca was Anne Mason's sister. Woolaston was a member of the powerful Goldsmiths' Company, a common council man and very rich; he was later to be one of the key financiers of the Civil War, 'emerging from each change of government ready and willing to lend to those who controlled the state'.[54] The money interests of Mason and Woolaston were closely interwoven, and it was Woolaston whom Mason left as guardian to his grandchildren.[55] But although his city friends were useful, Mason did not by any means lose touch with the court. For patron in place of Buckingham he had acquired Richard Weston the Lord High Treasurer, who later became the earl of Portland. Portland was connected with most of the schemes that occupied Mason's last years. Two of these proved to have a historical significance that far excelled the importance of Buckingham's naval excursions.

In 1632 a company named 'The Society of the Fishery of Great Britain and Ireland' was established with the object of breaking down the Dutch fishing power in the Hebrides.[56] One of its sub-associations

offers an interesting example of a financial enterprise undertaken by people of the same political clique – the friends and relatives of Buckingham. It drew together acquaintances from many different periods of Mason's life: he was in fact the connecting link between them. Portland was president, Buckingham's wife, father-in-law, sister and many of his close associates were subscribers, and on the Scottish side Sir William Alexander (now the earl of Stirling) and Sir John Scot were prominent. The king himself accepted the special status of 'protector', hoping that the profits of the company would ease his financial burden. Mason was the chief executive officer.[57] In the event the company failed: but it had an important consequence. It became involved in attempts to strengthen the English fleet *vis à vis* the Dutch, and one of the subscribers (William Noy, attorney general) suggested that this might be financed by a special levy of ship money. This was the origin of that famous exaction which John Hampden opposed. The first writ of ship money went out in 1634, a year before Mason's death.

But the enterprise that meant most to Mason was his vision of a new world across the Atlantic. In his view, the treasurership of the army had only been an interlude. What he really longed for in life was to found colonies overseas. Directly after Buckingham's death closed the active foreign policy of the king, Mason and Gorges returned to their old ambition. In November 1629 Mason obtained a grant assigning to him all the land between the Merrimac and Piscataqua rivers, which 'portion of land the said Captain John Mason intends to call *New Hampshire*'.[58] It was but a name at that date, a vague outline on a map with no settlement or civil government to give it substance: yet the name was to endure, and the territory we call 'New Hampshire' today had booked her place in history. None of Mason's overseas projects fulfilled his immediate hopes, yet he never ceased to persevere, and in his will (made during his last illness in November 1635) he left fantastic stretches of American land to his family and his native town of King's Lynn. Since his eldest grandson settled in America to pursue this claim while others of the family stayed in England, it is probable that there are descendants of Mason today on both sides of the Atlantic.

Portsmouth still holds memories of both Mason and Buckingham. The Greyhound, under its modern name of Buckingham House, stands in the High Street, skilfully preserved by its present owner. If a visitor enters the cathedral and looks toward the east end of the church, he sees exactly the architecture that Mason saw, when, as so often must have happened, he attended service there. Against the wall of the south chancel is Buckingham's stylish monument, transferred there from its original site behind the altar. Further south still, and of later date, is the Navy Aisle, where among trophies of war and peace hangs an American flag with a star on it that Mason named. A few minutes' walk away rises the gaunt shell of the Garrison Church, the old Domus Dei, where a nineteenth-century commemorative tablet to Mason could be seen until the devastation of the second world war. Neither man is buried in Portsmouth. Buckingham lies in splendour in Westminster Abbey. Mason, too, left instructions that he wished to rest there: but the authorities have no record of his name, and his burial place is unknown.

ABBREVIATIONS

CSPD Calendar of State Papers Domestic.
Dean See note 1.
PCA Portsmouth Corporation Archives.
PRO Public Record Office.

NOTES

1 Charters, letters and other papers relating to Mason are contained in *Captain John Mason, with letters and other historical documents* together with a memoir by C. W. Tuttle, edited by J. W. Dean, 1887.

2 Register of the Privy Council of Scotland, IX, pp. 16–19, 377.

3 Dean, p. 264.

4 The account of Mason's trial for piracy is to be found in the National Library of Scotland, Adv. MS. 31.1.1. vol. XIV, no. 48.

5 Dean, pp. 170–183.

6 Dean, p. 227.

7 J. Glanville; *The Voyage to Cadiz*, ed. A. B. Grosart. Camden Soc. N.S.XXXII. 1883. pp. 17, 125.

8 Glanville, *loc. cit.* See also Dean, p. 227.

9 See for example PRO. SPD 16/47/29, 31 and 47, also Dean, p. 229.

10 Dean, p. 255.

11 PRO. SPD 16/106/26.

12 PRO. SPD 16/66/83.

13 CSPD, 1628–9, p. 306.

14 Acts of the Privy Council 1627 Jan–Aug, e.g. pp. 170, 184, 206, etc.

15 Dean, pp. 237, 239.

16 CSPD, 1627–8, p. 170.

17 CSPD, 1627–8, p. 124.

[18] See L. Boynton: *Billeting: the Example of the Isle of Wight*. English Historical Review LXXIV. No. 290. Jan. 1959.

[19] PRO. SPD 16/33/27.

[20] CSPD, 1627–8, p. 148.

[21] PRO. SPD 16/30/37.

[22] PRO. SPD 16/66/67.

[23] Col. William Fleetwood: *An Unhappy View of the whole Behaviour of the duke of Buckingham at Ré*. 1647.

[24] PRO. SPD 16/80/81.

[25] PRO. SPD 16/79/58.

[26] Dean, p. 339.

[27] Dean, p. 245.

[28] PRO. AO1/300/1143.

[29] Dean, pp. 247–51.

[30] PRO. SPD 16/86/83

[31] PRO. SPD 16/86/86

[32] PRO. SPD 16/90/7.

[33] PRO. SPD 16/91/101 *Propositions by Captain John Mason.*

[34] PRO. SPD 16/92/69.

[35] PRO. SPD 16/87/11.

[36] PCA. Election Book IV, p. 305.

[37] PCA. Election Book IV, p. 321.

[38] PCA. Election Book IV, p. 324.

[39] PRO. SPD 16/106/32.

[40] PRO. SPD 16/120/71.

[41] Wills of William Haberley and Henry Holt at Somerset House.

[42] Dean, p. 257.

[43] Journal of the House of Commons, vol. I, p. 902.

[44] PRO. SPD 16/113/50.

[45] PRO. SPD 16/113/58.

[46] PRO. SPD 16/112/18 and 19.

[47] As Eisenhower did in 1944.

[48] The chief sources for the mutinies at Portsmouth and the assassination of Buckingham are: An anonymous account PRO. SPD 16/114/54: Sir Dudley Carleton's letter to the Queen of Bohemia: Sir Simon d'Ewes's Autobiography, p. 381: Dorchester's letter, PRO. SPD 16/114/27: Higham's letter given in the diary of John Rous, Camden Soc. 18 1861, p. 27: Howell's letter to the Countess of Sutherland: Sir Francis Nethersole's letter to the Queen of Bohemia: Sir John Oglander's *Memoirs* ed. Long, 1888: Rushworth's *Historical Collections*, 1659: *State Trials*, vol. III, p. 367: Willoughby's Examination, PRO. SPD 16/114/31: Sir Henry Wotton: *A Short View of the Life and Death of George Villiers duke of Buckingham*, 1642. Several of these are fully quoted in W. G. Gates: *Illustrated History of Portsmouth*, 1900, p. 221–7.

[49] PCA. L2/3.

[50] W. G. Gates, *loc. cit.* p. 313.

[51] Dean, p. 246.

[52] For Mason's work on Southsea Castle, see Dean, pp. 336–9, 346 and CSPD 1635 pp. 152, 161. For his commission see Dean, p. 348. For his report on Gravesend and Tilbury, see PRO. SPD 16/195/217.

[53] British Museum Add. MSS. 36448, f. 37.

[54] V. Pearl: *London and the Outbreak of the Puritan Revolution* 1961, pp. 328–31.

[55] Mason's will, which gives much information about his personal affairs as well as his American bequests, is printed by Dean, p. 390 *et seq.*

[56] See J. E. Elder: *The Royal Fisheries of the Seventeenth Century*, 1912.

[57] PRO. SPD 16/229/96.

[58] Dean, p. 186.

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